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Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leaders' Handbook Conversion

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14. ABSTRACT (<i>Maximum 200 words</i>) This report documents the development of an online version of the Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leaders' Handbook. The online handbook follows the earlier development of a paper-based version titled Family Support Group (FSG) Leaders' Handbook published as a U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) Study Report in April 2000. The handbook was converted to allow rapid, intuitive access to its information content in an inviting and usable Internet application. This brief report presents information on the design, graphics, programming, and review involved in developing the online handbook.							
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Final Report

Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leaders' Handbook Conversion

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The Family Support Group Leaders' Handbook published by the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) in April 2000 as a Study Report brings together the thinking of behavioral and social scientists, family support professionals, and Army families on how to operate the Army's key support mechanisms for families: the unit-based volunteers that are collectively known as the Family Readiness Group (FRG)*. The manual has been well received and is proving to be a valuable resource for commanders, support staff, and FRG volunteers. There was a desire to increase the utility of the manual by structuring it to allow rapid, intuitive access to the information it contains. Therefore, an effort was undertaken to convert the Handbook content to an open, inviting, and usable Internet application.

Design

A Family Readiness Group Leaders' Online Handbook Design Document was completed. This document was updated throughout the project and is presented in its final form in the Appendix. Based on the Design Document, detailed storyboards were developed. The storyboards showed the online application's structure, page layout, graphics, and text. In preparing the storyboards, it became evident that a wealth of material was available from active FRG web sites and public domain military Internet sources that could be used to illustrate and amplify the original Handbook content. Therefore, selected web-based text and graphics were integrated with the original Handbook content in the storyboards. Use of all FRG web site material was cleared with individual FRG representatives by ARI.

Graphics

Original graphics were developed for the user interface (see Figures 1-4). Additional graphics consisted of photographs obtained from FRG web sites (see Figure 2) and military Internet sources (see above), ARI-provided photographs, and – to a limited extent – photographs from L-3 Communications clip art libraries.

Programming

A programming approach that anticipates Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act was developed. Since no formal standards under Section 508 have been established by the U.S. Access Board, L-3 Communications used the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 as a basis for accessible web design. The FRG Leaders' Online Handbook should meet all Priority 1 checkpoints and many Priority 2 checkpoints, thus earning the "Bobby Approved" label for accessibility. Selected pages were tested using Bobby, an accessible design HTML validator.

* Since the publication of the manual, Family Support Groups are now called Family Readiness Groups.

Then, style sheets and the basic structure of the online handbook were developed. Finally, a prototype and, subsequently, alpha and beta versions of the application were developed and posted on the Internet. One feature of the Online Handbooks was that registered users could customize material presented in the application and interact with it in other ways. Interactions consisted of letting users customize long lists of information to suit individual needs, develop forms using ARI-provided guidance (see Figure 3), test themselves according to ARI-provided guidance (see Figure 4), and generate materials for a little fun (e.g., Icebreaker BINGO, where new items were presented in a random manner each time the user clicked on the Reload/Refresh button of their browser).

Quality control was effected by an online change function available on the Main Menu page of the application. Using this feature, both L-3 staff and ARI reviewers could enter change requests and track their progress.

Review

ARI reviewed the design document, storyboards, and online prototype. All were accepted with minor changes. Once the online prototype was posted, ARI had continual access to all versions of the application. The online change request function was active until all corrections and suggested changes had been made and the final product was delivered.

In addition, ARI made the online application available to a small sample of FRG leaders. The feedback was positive, and FRG-generated suggestions for improvement were implemented where feasible.

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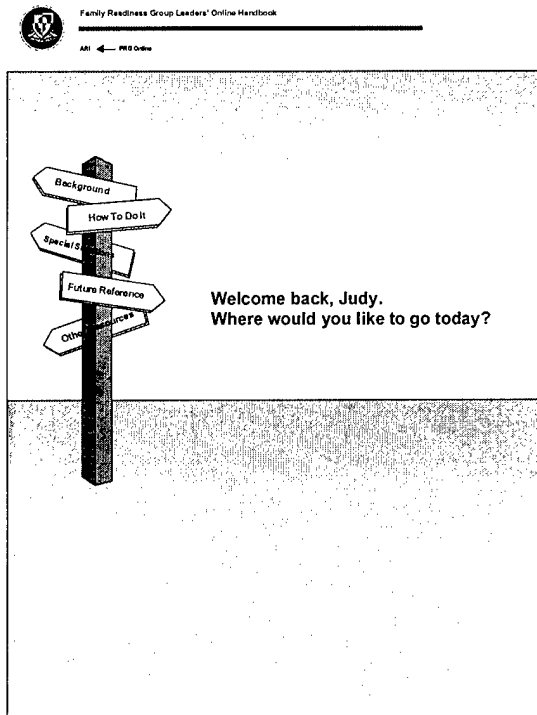


Figure 1. Main Menu storyboard.

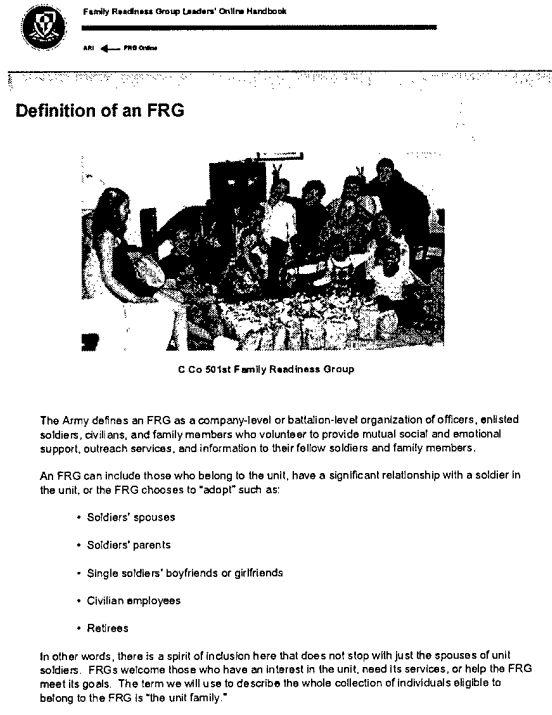


Figure 2. Storyboard showing a text page with a photograph obtained from an FRG web site.

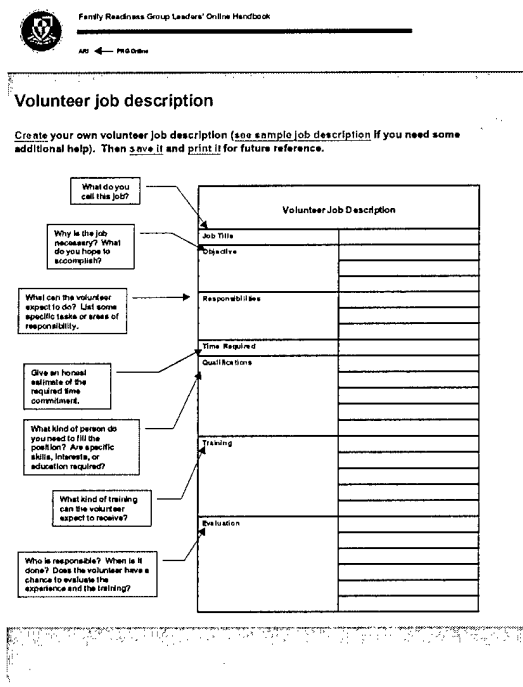


Figure 3. Storyboard showing an example on an interaction where users can enter and save their own material.

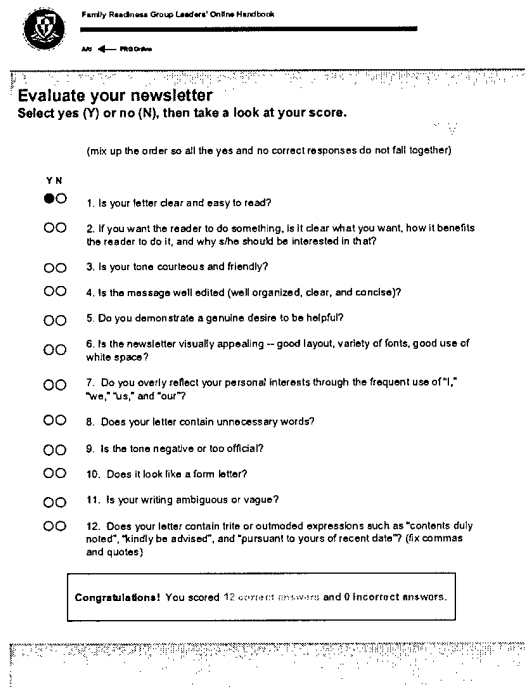


Figure 4. Storyboard showing an example on an interaction where users can test themselves.

Appendix

Family Readiness Group (FRG) Leaders' Handbook Conversion Design Document

Objectives

The basic objective of the online version of the handbook is to increase the accessibility of the information contained in the manual by making it available on the Internet in a visually pleasing, interactive manner. To this end, it will be designed to be:

- Open, inviting, and intuitive to any user -- including those with disabilities -- who has a basic understanding of internet conventions
- Suitable for the target audience, female and male military spouses who are FRG leaders
- User-oriented, giving the FRG leader and other users a sense of ownership
- Action-oriented, giving the FRG leader the information needed to accomplish tasks such as starting an FRG, improving an FRG, and keeping an FRG going.
- Sufficiently diverse and engaging that it will encourage users to return to the site repeatedly and to recommend the site to others

Features

- Customized displays that range from a user-specific welcome screen for return users (e.g., "Welcome back, Judy") to user-specified content organization.
- A task-oriented menu and link structure with simple navigation that includes display of the path taken to get to a particular screen and the ability to directly return to any page in that path.
- Graphics that are informative as well as illustrative, focusing on actual FRGs, FRG participants, and rapid-deployment units.
- Content that has direct practical application (e.g., information on how to start an FRG)
- Select interactions that are both instructional and entertaining (e.g., social meeting icebreakers)

Interface Look and Feel

- A balance of graphics (to provide visual interest, information, and variety) and "white space" (to allow visual structuring of information and easy skimming) will be presented.
- A rainbow palette (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple, with emphasis on or compatibility with ARI colors) will be used to reinforce the positive tone of the content. Clear rather than opaque textures will be used to reinforce the feeling of openness established by the interface structure. Colors that are typically associated with a particular gender (e.g., pinks and mauves) will not be used.
- Standard Internet usability conventions (e.g., black sans serif text, blue unused links, purple used links) will be followed.
- Situational awareness cues for navigation (i.e., "you are here") will be available at all times.
- Interface design will be compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Basic Content Structure

1. Introduction (new users only)
2. Optional registration (new users or previous users who wish to make changes)
3. Where do you want to go today? (Main Menu)

3.1. FRG background information. What would you like to know?

3.1.1. What is an FRG?

3.1.1.1. Definition

3.1.1.2. Concept

3.1.1.2.1. What an FRG is not (therapy group, social club)

3.1.1.3. Early History

(Revolutionary War, Frontier Army, World War II)

3.1.1.3.1. The story of Molly Pitcher

3.1.1.4. Origins of the modern FRG

3.1.1.4.1. The role of FT Bragg in FRG evolution

3.1.1.4.1.1. Why FSGs are now called FRGs

3.1.1.5. Funding

3.1.1.6. Structure

3.1.1.6.1. Alternative FRG structures

3.1.2. What is the relationship of the FRG to the unit?

3.1.2.1. Mandate

3.1.2.2. Commander's role

3.1.2.2.1. The commander's role during deployment

3.1.2.2.1.1. The importance of an effective Rear Detachment (RD)

3.1.3. What do typical FRG members do?

3.1.3.1. Hold meetings

(Social, Informational)

3.1.3.2. Arrange special events

3.1.3.3. Help soldiers and families

3.1.3.3.1. The role of the FRG in the Green Ramp Disaster

3.2. How-to information for FRG leaders. What would you like to learn to do?

3.2.1. Start an FRG

3.2.1.1. Become a leader

(Definition, Commander's role, Initial activities, Status)

3.2.1.1.1. Likely FRG leaders

3.2.1.1.1.1. Should the FRG leader be the commander's spouse?

3.2.1.2. Get command support

3.2.1.3. Find volunteers

(Limitations, Recruiting, Hard-to-fill positions)

3.2.1.3.1. Possible volunteer positions

3.2.1.3.2. Volunteer job description

3.2.1.3.2.1. Sample job description

3.2.1.4. Establish the structure

3.2.1.5. Raise money

3.2.1.5.1. Auction suggestions

3.2.1.5.2. Bake sale suggestions

3.2.1.5.3. Booth suggestions

- 3.2.1.5.4. Opportunity drawing suggestions
- 3.2.1.5.5. Special and ongoing services suggestions
- 3.2.1.5.6. Fines suggestions
- 3.2.1.5.7. Other fundraising suggestions

3.2.1.6. Set up accounting systems

3.2.1.7. Find appropriate facilities

3.2.1.8. Arrange transportation

3.2.1.9. Get things printed and disseminated
(General, Newsletters)

3.2.2. Improve my FRG

3.2.2.1. Establish rosters

- 3.2.2.1.1. Unit roster
- 3.2.2.1.2. FSG membership roster
- 3.2.2.1.3. FSG volunteer roster

3.2.2.2. Manage volunteers better

3.2.2.3. Improve communication

3.2.2.3.1. Rapid disbursement of family information

3.2.2.3.1.1. Telephone trees or circles

- 3.2.2.3.1.1.1. Using government telephones
- 3.2.2.3.1.1.2. Telephone tips
- 3.2.2.3.1.1.3. Cellular telephones and beepers

3.2.2.3.1.2. Effective phone system management

3.2.2.3.1.3. Electronic mail

3.2.2.3.2. Other forms of communication

3.2.2.3.2.1x Unit handbooks

3.2.2.3.2.1. Newsletters

- 3.2.2.3.2.1.1. Suggestions for newsletter content
- 3.2.2.3.2.1.2. Newsletter style guidelines (Letterhead, Greeting and body, Closing, Signature, Final touches)
- 3.2.2.3.2.1.3. Evaluate your newsletter

3.2.2.3.2.2. Personal cards and letters (Unit families, Deployed soldiers)

3.2.2.4. Improve meetings

3.2.2.4.1. General guidelines

3.2.2.4.1.1. Meeting regularity

3.2.2.4.1.2. Other things to consider (Advertising, Ground rules, Use of time)

3.2.2.4.2. The social element in meetings (Purely social meetings, Combined social-informational meetings)

3.2.2.4.2.1. Icebreakers

3.2.2.4.2.1.1. Icebreaker BINGO

3.2.2.4.3. Suggestions for making meetings more effective

3.2.2.5. Add interesting activities

3.2.2.5.1. Athletic activity suggestions

3.2.2.5.2. Food-centered activity suggestions

3.2.2.5.3. Seasonal activity suggestions

3.2.2.5.4. Other activity suggestions

3.2.2.6. Provide better support for soldiers and families

3.2.3. Keep my FRG going

3.2.3.1. Keeping volunteers

3.2.3.1.1. Motivating volunteers

3.2.3.1.1.1. 101 ways to motivate volunteers

3.2.3.2. Avoiding leader burnout

3.2.3.2.1. Difficult situations (Multiple problem families, Excessively dependent spouses, Excessively demanding spouses, Families scheming early returns)

3.3. Special situations where FRG support is critical. Which do you need to address?

3.3.1. New soldiers and families

3.3.1.1. Basic steps in helping new families

3.3.1.1.1. Suggestions on how to help new families

3.3.1.1.1.1. Additional Army relocation programs

3.3.2. Deployment

3.3.2.1. One FRGs tips on surviving deployment

3.3.3. Traumatic times

3.3.3.1. Crisis intervention

- 3.3.3.1.1. General rules for crisis intervention
 - 3.3.3.1.2. How to help in a crisis
 - 3.3.3.2. Grieving families

- 3.3.4. Homecoming and reunion
 - 3.3.4.1. Welcome home parties
 - 3.3.4.2. Providing support following reunion

3.4. References

- 3.4.1. Army Family Liaison Office (AFLO)
- 3.4.2. Fort Bragg, North Carolina
- 3.4.3. 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Airborne)
- 3.4.4. III Corps and Fort Hood
- 3.4.5. Military Family Resource Center
- 3.4.6. US Army Community and Family Support Center (USACFSC)
- 3.4.7. US Army War College

3.5. Additional help

- 3.5.1. Agencies that families might find helpful